

only 6 acceptable records (Leonard 1999, Dowsett *et al.* in prep. *The Birds of Zambia*) and none further north than 15° S. The current record roughly doubles the distance that past vagrants to Zambia have wandered.

What was almost certainly the same bird was observed in Arusha National Park (30 km to the northwest) the following week. Daudi Maige, a park ranger, submitted this record to the Tanzania Bird Atlas (Baker & Baker in prep. *Birds of Tanzania: an atlas of distribution and seasonality* <http://tanzaniabirdatlas.com>) without knowledge of our sighting

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Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus* feeding grounds in northern Tanzania

Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus* is currently evaluated as a species of least concern (www.iucnredlist.org, accessed November 2006) with a world population estimate of 40 000–55 000 individuals (Delany & Scott 2002). Caspian Plover breeds in Central Asia and migrates to southern Asia and Africa for the winter (Urban *et al.* 1986, Maclean 1988). The Serengeti short grass plains have long been recognised as possibly the most important winter feeding grounds for Caspian Plover in East Africa (Britton 1980, Urban *et al.* 1986, Baker 1995, Zimmerman *et al.* 1996), but adjacent grasslands may be equally, if not more, important.

Between 10 and 14 January 2005, we counted 1678 Caspian Plovers in the Eyasi Basin of northern Tanzania during the Tanzania waterbird census. We counted 533 Caspian Plovers feeding on short grass plains in the Yaida Valley (03°51'S, 34°47'E) on 10 January and a further two flocks numbering 545 and 600 feeding on two of the Matala short grass plains (03°51'34"S, 34°47'15"E) between 12 and 14 January 2005.

398 Caspian Plovers counted on the southeast side of Lake Eyasi in 1995 (Baker 1995) were assumed to be using the shallow waters of the lake as a safe

roosting site, but feeding was believed to take place to the west of Lake Eyasi on the Serengeti short grass plains. The results of our 2005 census indicate that the Eyasi Basin provides important feeding areas for wintering populations of Caspian Plovers as well, with much larger flock sizes than those reported previously (Britton 1980, Urban *et al.* 1986, Maclean 1988). Notably, the 1 % of population threshold for Caspian Plover congregations is 480 birds (Delany & Scott 2002).

Our observations indicated that Caspian Plovers preferred short grassy plains with a high percentage of bare ground, especially in areas which remained wet from recent rains. Closer examination at Matala revealed a soil which was a brown, heavy vertisol clay and prone to periodic inundation. The grassland was dominated by a short leafy *Panicum* sp. with total ground cover of about 20 % and extensive but discrete bare patches several metres across. Harvester termites (*Hodotermitidae*) and ants were abundant, a documented food of Caspian Plover (Maclean 1988), along with spiders and other predatory insects. Heavy grazing pressure by cattle and sheep was clearly evident, but there was a green flush and the soil was still wet from recent rain.

Wildebeest and cattle show considerable overlap of grazing niche. As non-selective grazing ruminants, both seek out a short grass sward that is relatively homogeneous and of high nutritive value. We suggest that wildebeest on the Serengeti plains and cattle on the plains of Yaida and Matala in the Eyasi Basin both create and maintain optimal feeding habitat for species such as Caspian Plovers.

References

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